

# **MALAWI 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom, and the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues with government officials and leaders and members of religious groups in the country. During Ramadan the embassy hosted an iftar for young Muslim leaders at which the Ambassador promoted freedom of religion and expressed appreciation for the country's rich religious diversity.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 16.8 million (July 2013 estimate). According to the 2008 decennial census, approximately 83 percent of the population is Christian. Most Christians belong to the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. There are also small numbers of Anglicans, Baptists, evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists. Muslims, 90 percent of whom are Sunni, constitute approximately 13 percent of the population. The largest concentration of Muslims is along the shores of Lake Malawi, south of Mangochi District. Other religions constitute approximately 2 percent of the population and include Hindus, Bahais, and very small numbers of Rastafarians and Jews.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

Religious groups must register with the government in order to be recognized as a legal entity. They do so by submitting documentation to the justice ministry detailing the structure and mission of their organization, along with a nominal fee. Once approved, a religious group formally registers with the Registrar General's office. Registration is for administrative purposes such as taxation and property

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ownership. It does not constitute approval of religious beliefs, nor is it a prerequisite for religious activities.

Foreign missionaries are required to have employment permits.

The law guides regulation of all broadcasting and states that, with regard to religious broadcasting, “licensees shall not broadcast any material which is indecent or obscene or offensive to public morals (including abusive or insulting language) or offensive to the religious convictions of any section of the population or likely to prejudice the safety of the Republic or public order and tranquility.”

Religious instruction is mandatory in public primary schools. It is available as an elective in public secondary schools. In some schools, the religious curriculum is a Christian-oriented “Bible Knowledge” course, while in others it is an interfaith “Moral and Religious Education” course drawing from the Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Bahai faiths. Individual parent-teacher associations or school committees decide which religion courses to offer. Private Christian and Islamic schools offer religious instruction in their respective faiths.

### Government Practices

Some Muslim groups continued to request that the education ministry discontinue use of the “Bible Knowledge” course, and use only the broader-based “Moral and Religious Education” course in primary schools, particularly in predominantly Muslim areas.

The government upheld constitutional provisions for religious freedom and protected the rights of citizens to hold and manifest their religious beliefs.

Religious groups operated several media outlets, including 11 radio and three television stations, without government interference.

Most meetings and events, large or small, begin and end with a prayer. Government officials strive to ensure religious diversity at larger government events.

The registrar general’s office in the justice ministry reported that as of November, 63 religious groups had registered during the year.

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### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Christians, Muslims, and Hindus often participated in business or civil society organizations together. The Interfaith Public Affairs Committee, the Muslim Association of Malawi, the Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi, the Islamic Information Bureau, and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, worked together as members of the Malawi Electoral Support Network on human rights and good governance issues, and implemented civic education programs.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious freedom issues with government officials and leaders and members of religious groups in the country. The Ambassador hosted an iftar for young Muslim leaders and prominent members of the Muslim community, some of whom were government officials. The Ambassador's remarks underscored the importance of freedom of religion and appreciation of the country's rich religious diversity. On December 4, the Deputy Chief of Mission gave an interview to Radio Islam on the issue of religious pluralism.